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REPORT TO THE EDITORS

Plantation Treasure



AT MY plantation home in North Carolina, a property which has been in my family since 1880, I have found a good deal of what might be termed buried treasure. I have found a cache of thirty-two Dutch ducats, buried deeply in one of seven cellars. I have found 2000 antique bottles, Indian quartz ornaments, some Spanish silver coins, a remarkable collection of buttons and two old medals. When you are hoeing digging holes for flowering shrubs and cactuses, as I am, or a place over which two great wars have passed, you will be sure to dig up something.

All these minor treasures I have written about in my book, *Home by the River*. By that book also I described a treasure map which I discovered by sifting from an antique chest which had no remains, but of that time the map had been so good. I had not found the treasure to which it was the key. Now I have, and have a half pound of ancient money, and it is real buried treasure.

My money, dedicated they say, in one particular, only regularly accurate, before the money market it occurred before I found the exact spot in the yard of which the treasure lay. First, indeed, on the southern side of the buried treasure in which we have, all the details described, but here is one. It happened this time I was in the yard before daylight one morning, intending to take some visitors to friends who live in a near-by summer village, but as it seemed too early to start, I began killing time by rather idly grubbing along on one of garden beds that I had laid out from the steps. I was using a long steel rod as a probe, and at one point the rod struck what sounded and felt like a tin.

Not especially interested, I began to dig with a small mattock and came on the tin, set on edge, some two feet underground. Although it was not yet full daylight, by feeling and careful digging I discovered a circle of tin foil, all set on edge and in a large circle. The tin foil, about fourteen inches square, that stood horizontally above the others, as it suspended. This puzzling tin, I discovered by exploring under it, rested on a small glass about three inches. The tin, rough on top but polished underneath, was sealed down tightly to the creek. Lifting the creek with its stone cover still in place, the whole thing shuddered and half sunk. I carried it into the house in some excitement and sent to my wife, "I believe I have found the treasure."

There's Gold in That Creek

As we carefully delved into this curious treasure, we found, wrapped in strips from the old Charleston Mercury of April, 1861, copper, silver and gold coins, all American and all antedating 1861. Clearly, then, the treasure had been buried in the year of a two-year-old newspaper had been only found in 1936. The only foreign piece was an Italian silver medal, massive, ornate and twice as large as the average silver dollar, and apparently of the thirteenth century. By elaborate assumption I have not been able to decipher.

In sealed tin, value, the amount of money thus found is not great. But the coin value alone is considerable. And though the discovery cannot be considered spectacular, the finding of the map, the following of the long trail and the ultimate sifting of this treasure into its place, in fact, is more modern legend, a treasure hunt of that nature that we can associate with buried treasure.

There were money, many coins, but according to the laws of the country, the gold belonged to me. There are two ten-dollar gold pieces of 1793, quiet and beautiful; there is a five-dollar gold piece of 1793 that looks as if it had never been used; there are silver five and ten, some three-dollar gold pieces, and strange little gold dollars of two designs. There is one privately minted gold dollar of 1861 from the mint of Charles Butler, who had his establishment near Charleston, North Carolina.

It is not difficult to guess how this creek of money came to be buried. My grandfather lived here on this plantation, a small farmer and very much alone, throughout the Civil War, so my own father was with Lee in Virginia. During the war, my ancestor's money was full of money of reason, in fact, seldom did visit him. What would have been more natural than for my grandfather to gather up what money happened to be on hand, together with the few little pieces that may have been family treasures, and bury them in the back yard? I believe that hundreds of similar cases occurred. In some instances the treasure thus concealed was later recovered, such as the 11 dollars, mentioned buried in this day.

—AARON B. REYNOLDS

(Mr. Rutledge is the author of many books and magazine articles.)